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## Book Notes

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**BOOK NOTES**

by Archie P. McDonald

Despite the inevitable partisanship of American politics, Jimmy Carter is nearly everyone's favorite *former* president. Some are just glad he is gone; others miss the honesty and forthrightness that characterized his time in the Oval Office. One of the reasons so many have come to like Carter is the number of excellent books he has written on such varied subjects as fishing, the environment, and now growing up in an era only other old timers can remember. In *An Hour Before Daylight: Memories Of A Rural Boyhood* (Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, \$26), Carter tells us how he came to be the person he is. There are vivid descriptions of Carter's boyhood home in Archery, of schools and businesses in Plains, of farm chores and ways of life shared by the graybeards yet among us. For my generation, not so different from Carter's, his writing evokes nostalgia for the good of those "old days" but also gratitude that now we have the blessing of air conditioning and other conveniences. Two themes appear throughout the book: Carter's love for but uneasy relationship with his father; and changes in racial attitudes during his lifetime. Few did more than Carter and members of his administration to advance the cause of racial equality in Georgia and then America, but there is also sadness that the price has included the loss of friendship, one might say intimacy, between the races. Carter is candid about his remarkable – some would say bizarre – family, especially father Earl, mother "Miss Lillian," sisters Ruth and Gloria, and brother Billy. But my favorite family anecdote involved an ancestor who moved to Texas in the nineteenth century. When his wife died, he returned to Georgia and married her younger sister, Loua. Later, when she died, he directed in his will that he be buried between his wives, "but 'tilted a little toward Loua.'" There is humor in that hour before daylight.

Rich Phalen's *Events That Shaped The Nation* (Pelican Publishing Co., 1000 Burmazer St., Gretna, LA 70053) is based on the premise that fundamental changes in the world resulted from necessary adjustments following WWI and the Depression. Phalen presents comments candid and partisan from thirty-nine "witnesses" to those adjustments; some were participants, some historian observers. Some of the "big" names are exploited a bit – Stephen Ambrose comes to mind – though their observations constitute a fraction of the accounts. The observers begin with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and other WWII-related events such as battles at Midway and Iwo Jima and the development of the atomic bomb. Harry Truman gets good treatment in Cold War leadership and civil rights adjustments, and one of the best testimonies in the book is Carl Erskine's memories of Jackie Robinson. Old Joe McCarthy comes in for his usual scathing, now that it is safe to do so, and the most poignant entries deal with changed hearts after the showdown in Little Rock in 1957 over school integration. There is a flaw here that I must point out. The first order for integration involved Mansfield High School, not Marshall High School, in those Texas towns, as stated on page 136. Highlights

for me were entries by Dino Breugioni, the aerial photography analyst who identified Russian missile sites in Cuba in 1962, and Robert Lipsyte's analysis of the pivotal role of Cassius Clay, *nee* Muhammad Ali. Low lights are the entries on drugs and addiction, but I suppose they are necessary for a complete review of the "events that shaped the nation."

*Once Upon A Time In Texas: A Liberal In The Lone Star State*, by David Richards (University of Texas Press, Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, \$39.95), is an interesting book from several perspectives. Mine include a kind of identification with a fellow married to a wife in the political spotlight, for Richards provided our Governor Ann Willis Richards with the family name by which she is known to the world. Governor Ann does not figure prominently in Richards' account of his life and legal career, but neither is she neglected. He mentions her most in accounts of his early career, less after she entered elected politics save for her bruising Democratic primary victory over his friend and former client-employer, Attorney General Jim Mattox. Another learning experience was the realization of the crucial role that Richards, who is known, I suspect, by most Texans not keenly attuned to state politics and litigation as the governor's former husband, played in so many societal changing court cases that dealt with redistricting at all levels, single-member districts in local governments, and school finance. Think of any legal challenge to "the way we were" in the last thirty years and likely Richards was the lawyer forcing the issue in favor of such clients as Nacogdoches' own Arthur Weaver or Lufkin's Inez Tims. Liberal he was, and still is, though mellowed. I suspect I would have liked David Richards, had we met. Perhaps he could have explained to me why one liberal is never "pure" enough for another liberal.

*Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, by Joseph J. Ellis (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2000), has been around a couple of years but I have just gotten around to reading it and recommending it to you. Our culture features the "Founding Fathers," or those who completed our American Revolution and then launched our nation. The focus here is on the interaction of the actors themselves – hence "brothers – taken from John Adams' reference to them as a "band of brothers," a concept which came originally from Shakespeare about another band in an earlier battle. This collection of essays begins with the story of the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr that ended Hamilton's life. Much of the rest of the book is about division and collaboration. The divisions are between Hamilton and Adams; Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, and Adams and Jefferson; and the collaborations of Adams and Jefferson and Jefferson and Madison. Several themes emerge from Ellis' essays, at least for me. One, Washington was nearly perfect, at least as far as his vision for America's development; the brothers agreed on independence but disagreed on the best path for developing the nation, with nationalism v. state's rights and England v. France as friends the usual features; Adams' views were more accurate than Jefferson's but Jefferson's version of the history of their time prevails; and slavery was the one irreconcilable issue and so the brothers chose to ignore it and trust their

successors to find a solution. This book is recommended, with the warning that you have to engage it, think about it, as you read it.

The long-awaited third volume of Robert A. Caro's biography of Lyndon B. Johnson, titled *Master of the Senate* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2002) has appeared after more than a decade since we read about LBJ's career in the House and victory in the Senate race in 1948. I have wondered how Caro would treat Johnson the Majority Leader. After criticism from LBJ partisans – especially Texans – about all the negative things Caro said about his principal subject in the first two volumes of a proposed four-volume biography, the author asked them to wait for volume three, where the “hero” would begin to emerge. Well, it does, sort of. I have three major observations. This book, which runs to 1040 pages of text, could have been much shorter if Caro had told us most of what he tells us only once, or for emphasis in some case, maybe twice. That is not the case. Second, it also could have been shorter if some subjects had been handled more succinctly. The second hundred pages – that is 100 pages – are devoted to how Richard B. Russell became so powerful in the Senate. Later, we learn that Russell empowered Johnson; we could have learned that quicker. Third, most of these pages still drip with negative aspects of the Johnson persona – how badly he treated Lady Bird, how abusive he was to employees, how crude he was in personal behavior – things we read in the first two volumes. That said, Caro is a master stylist. I have told several forums that I wish I had the skill to tell the story of “bringing light to the Hill Country” as Caro did in volume one; here, my envy engages in his tracing of the emergence of genuine compassion in LBJ for African Americans and Mexican Americans and passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Even so, we are reminded frequently of the pragmatism, that LBJ couldn't offend Russell and the South, or the Liberals, too much, because of his all-consuming ambition for the presidency. So what do I say? This is a masterfully written book about twelve years in the life of LBJ. I know a biographer must present truth as he perceives it, but I wish Caro liked LBJ a little more. Lord knows (and we know) that he had warts; but I get tired of reading about the same old warts over and over again. If you read I and II, you have to read III. If you haven't, start with I so you will know what III is all about.